

Seattle City Council

Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee Meeting

2 p.m. Wednesday, September 14th, 2011

Words' Worth

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Sibyl James**

Today's poet is **Sharon Cumberland**

Sharon Cumberland teaches English at Seattle University where she is the director of the Creative Writing Program. She moved to Seattle from New York City in 1994. Her first collection of poems, *Peculiar Honors*, is forthcoming from Black Heron Press in October, 2011. She has published in journals including *Ploughshares*, *The Iowa Review*, *Verse* and *Image*. She has won *Kalliope's* Sue Sanial Elkind Award, The Pacific Northwest Writer's Association's Zola Award for Poetry, and the Writers Haven Press Bright Side Award. She was a Writer in Residence at the Jack Straw Foundation, and Poet in Residence at the Seasons Music Festival in Yakima, WA. Her chapbooks are *The Arithmetic of Mourning* from Green Rock Press, and *Greatest Hits 1985-2000*, from Pudding House Press.

TACOMA SCREW

by Sharon Cumberland

It's not what you think. It's just an industrial
fabricator in Washington State: tools, pipe fittings,
screws. You, however, thought of bad
behavior, something performed in brothels,
the Wild West. Or perhaps you thought
it was the moniker of someone bad and dashing:
Don Giovanni, Mack the Knife, Tacoma Screw.
I don't blame you.

It's the nature of double entendres—
everybody's smutty joke.

Maybe the old gent
back in 1892, hanging his shingle, setting out stores,
came up with a little pun for the loggers
on the corduroy road. Not the sort of codger
to mind that cyclists a century later
ride by and snigger at the innocent past—

Tacoma Screw!—as though
the risqué is invented anew in the mind
of every kid on a mountain bike.

On the other hand
there could have been a Tacoma Screw,
like Butch Cassidy or Billy the Kid—
seductive as Casanova,
glamorous as Zorro,
renowned among mountain men and dancing girls
in rotgut saloons all up and down the Columbia,
famous for his threaded weapon—
once sunk, so hard to remove.

--END--